

**Testimony of**

**Robin C. Schwartz, M.S., C.G.C.**

*in support of*

**SB 857- AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSURE FOR GENETIC  
COUNSELORS**

**February 20, 2015**

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Markley, Representative Srinivasan and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Robin Schwartz and I am here to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 857- An Act Concerning Licensure for Genetic Counselors. Thank you for raising this bill.

I have been a genetic counselor at UCONN Health since 1987. In that capacity I have provided genetic counseling for families affected with muscular dystrophy and hemophilia, been on the team taking care of newborns, children and adults with inherited metabolic conditions and for the past 10 years, my area of practice is in inherited cancer risk assessment.

The first program to train genetic counselors began at Sarah Lawrence College in New York in 1969, one year after the first human gene was assigned to a (non-X) chromosome. The field was as exciting then as it is now. The ideas about the use of greater knowledge of our genetic makeup to help understand and make a positive impact on public health was in its early stages. Then we could only imagine what we now know about the implications of genes on cancer risk, heart health, drug metabolism and susceptibility to infectious disease.

As genetic information continues to emerge, and advances in technology continue to make techniques of a few months ago obsolete, we have a great and serious obligation. We have an obligation to ensure that Connecticut residents are fully aware of the credentials, level of education and training, and professional standards of the individuals who hold themselves out as genetic counselors in our State.

To that end, this year was an honor and great privilege to work with the Department of Public Health as a member of the Genetic Counseling Scope of Practice Review Committee. The Committee Report acknowledged the scope of the practice of genetic counselors as defined on a national level (<http://nsgc.org/p/cm/ld/fid=18#scope>). The scope is unique to our profession and referenced above. I can address any questions about the specific aspects of the role of genetic counselors as integral members of the healthcare team, as well.

The report supports the pathway to become a genetic counselor and maintain certification. The requirements for training and continuing education are national standards, and in seeking licensure in Connecticut (as is now the standard in 19 states, including our neighbors Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New Hampshire), this greatly relieves our state from the larger burden of establishing additional standards,

including establishment of a training program and training program certification. Since all certified genetic counselors sit for a national board examination, (administered by the American Board of Genetic Counseling, Inc. - ABGC) there is no need for a state licensing examination. Since there are national requirements to maintain certification, the requirements for recertification also would not have to be designed.

We have the opportunity now to move this forward and be on the path towards the national standard, like our neighbors to the north and south.

People who consult with us often ask for a recommendations for care for their relatives who who also may also be at risk for a familial genetic condition. Some of the relatives live in other states, and knowing who is a licensed genetic counselor allows for a level of confidence in the recommendations I can provide.

If a client is interested in seeing a mental health professional, I can help them find a licensed psychiatrist, or psychologist, or social worker, to ensure their concerns will be addressed by a professional with the appropriate training, practice guidelines and ethical standards that are their professional mandates. If a client is in need for other specialized care, the professional designation and laws that protect the specialist titles and determine the consequences of poor practice, protect our residents, just as licensing would provide with respect to genetic counseling.

In closing I would like to thank the chairs and committee for the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill, which provides both title protection and addresses the need to protect our health consumers. The National Society of Genetic Counselors has offered an Amendment to this Bill to the Committee, which I strongly support. The Amendment has minor suggestions to the committee for your consideration. Thank you.

2/18/2015  
RCS